

THE
Scarcity of Wheat Considered:

OR,
A STATEMENT

OF THE
IMPOLICY OF THE LATE AND PRESENT

Price of Wheat,

THE
Consequences resulting from it, and Means suggested
for its Prevention in future:

IN WHICH

The flagrant Practices of Farmers, Millers, & Bakers,

ARE EXPOSED,

AND THE

CORN LAWS FULLY INVESTIGATED.

BY THE REV. J. MALHAM,

Vicar of Helton, Dorset; and Ordinary of the County Gaol of Wilts.

"He that withholdeth Corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it."—*Prov. xi. 26.*

"An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed."—*Prov. xx. 21.*

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Pages, though obviously written with much expedition, are the result of long reflection on the important subject. The Facts which are stated in support of the Arguments advanced, are very strong and pointed; and serve to demonstrate the magnitude of the evil, of which the Public have long had such serious cause to complain. The Author has no personal resentment against any one; he wishes only to expose that system of tyranny and oppression over the middle and inferior classes of the community, which have been too long prevalent in the united kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland. But he thinks proper to observe, that, in avowing his name as the advocate of the community, he will neither answer personal attacks on any observations or facts he has stated, nor take notice of any anonymous replies. To a manly and generous opponent, he will rejoin in as generous a way; and if in any thing he has been misinformed, he will as liberally acknowledge it, on fair grounds of evidence, or maintain his positions, if the arguments opposed are insufficient to the purpose.

SALISBURY, *August 8, 1800.*

Striking Quotations from the Work.

“ IF one class of society is exalted to the gross injury of the rest, a remedy must be applied without delay.”—Page 8.

“ No substitute can be found for the want of bread. The price of other articles of food usually advances in proportion to the dearness of wheat.”—Page 20.

“ It is not only probable, but even certain, that many persons are at this moment in a state of CONSUMPTION, from the WANT OF BREAD in sufficient degree, or the compulsory alternative of eating barley-bread, and frequently too of very bad quality.”—Page 31.

“ Unless common fame should prove a notorious jilt, a dealer in flour, who lives not more than one hundred miles from Salisbury, has *burnt his fingers*, by withholding from market, a large supply of that article, because his avarice was greater than his prudence, in refusing to allow a fair price for carriage.”—Page 34.

“ It is said that the bakers have been compelled to open their bags, to supply their stocks of flour in hand with fresh and wholesome air.”—*Ibid.*

“ Acts of Parliament are dead letters, unless enforced ; and never was there a season, when it was so highly necessary to enforce them, by suing for the penalties incurred in transgressing them.”—Page 36.

Scarcity of Wheat Considered, &c.

“**W**HERE IS THE SCARCITY?” is the language now echoed from mouth to mouth, and reflected from one end of the kingdom to the other; from the metropolis to the distant provinces, and from the distant provinces to the metropolis.

We, of this county,* in common with our countrymen, may laudably join the POPULAR CRY. We of this country in general, have abundant cause to adopt and proclaim the general sentiment. Whether we of this city† have so fully felt and experienced the benefit of the rapid change, as many others of our neighbours, is a consideration which may be treated hereafter, if our limits permit.

On a topic of so important a nature and tendency, can we remain silent? Shall we not admire the wisdom of an all-sufficient controuling PROVIDENCE, which can bring good out

* Wiltshire.

† Salisbury.

of evil; which can frustrate the machinations of the crafty, and bring to nought the artifices of the designing. Ungrateful shall we be for his numerous bountiful acts of goodness to us, heretofore conferred on unworthy and undeserving mortals, if we refrain from ejaculating the praises of him, who hath thus raised us from darkness into a marvellous light. Which way soever we turn our eyes, or in whatever direction we lend an ear, the cheering sounds of the peasant's lips declare the joyful sentiments of his heart, and our drooping spirits are exhilarated and revived with the gratifying relation of the welcome contrast.

But whilst we rejoice in the pleasing reverse, which we have so rapidly witnessed; it would surely be most unbecoming, and, with a view to the Almighty's providential operations in his government of the world, most wantonly criminal, to neglect an enquiry into the NATURAL or MORAL CAUSES of the depressing calamity. Now that we are so happily emerging from the gloomy abyss, in which we were nearly overwhelmed, surely we may and certainly we ought to consider, how far, and in what respects, we ourselves, as a community, or as individuals, have been instrumental in promoting the misery we have felt so severely, and in augmenting the burdens which have so long oppressed us.

When the first ejaculation, universally bursting forth on the gladdening occasion, has subsided into calm reasoning and sober reflection, the

the voice of REASON may be heard. In the moment of rejoicing, perhaps, it will be overlooked; under the apprehension of scarcity and want, it was certainly forgotten. I mean not to advance the position, that SUPERFLUITY was in any respect to be considered as a true representation of the national situation. I mean not to assert, that it would not have required the most rigid œconomy, to make the quantity of wheat hold out to the æra of the present promising harvest; or, at the utmost, to protract the consumption of the grain in the country, independent of any expected foreign supplies, to a time when the produce of the coming harvest could fairly be brought to market, in any quantity sufficient to meet the demand for daily consumption. But the great question is, “Was there actually a scarcity?” Or, was there any real cause for the extravagant and oppressive advances of the price of grain, to the almost intolerable grievance of all, and to a comparative starvation of the lower classes of the community? It is this subject which merits a very serious investigation. It is the policy or impolicy of driving to desperation the bulk of the people, to enrich a few individuals, who may have it in their power, because there is not a superfluity, to produce all the effects of a real famine, which loudly calls for a serious enquiry. Can it be consistent with the happiness of any well-regulated state, that such evils and such mischiefs should be permitted?

That "these things ought not so to be," will not be denied by any, but those who are interested. Neither will these persons attempt or dare to avow them directly, but under the specious cover of some other delusive mis-application of a general principle, the propriety of which will not be disputed. It is admitted, that in all commerce, DEALERS HAVE A RIGHT to procure the best price they can for the articles they deal in. But what then? Have they a right to use the sinister means, of creating false alarms, of diffusing and spreading ideas of scarcity, of propagating and inculcating principles, inconsistent with the welfare and existence of the community? What are the laws against combinations of every description, but so many checks on the mis-application of the general principle, admitted on one hand, and asserted and contended for on the other? What are the laws against forestalling, engrossing, and regrating, but so many restraints upon the mischievous consequences of that licentious liberty in commercial matters, which this general principle seems to admit? Has not the necessity of these been occasioned, by the very sinister arts in other concerns, of which there is so just cause of complaint on this subject? But regulations have been adopted, according to the necessity of the case, in other respects; and, until they are equally adopted in this, a repetition of the evils we have so recently escaped from, will be a natural consequence of any unpropitious season

season or unfavourable harvest. It is the duty of the legislature to enable the executive government to prevent this. It is the duty of every individual, in his public or his private capacity, to promote a regulation, which will have a better tendency to secure the peace of society and the welfare of the community, than any support which the civil power can derive from the assistance of the military, in the season of general pressure and calamity.

What the NECESSARY REGULATIONS upon this subject may be, shall hereafter be submitted. But it may be asked, if there is such a necessity, "Is there not a cause?" There is; and that an obvious one. That general relaxation of morals, which has subverted kingdoms, and convulsed empires to the very centre, which has gained a too fatal ascendancy in this nation, and endangered the very existence of our admired constitution, sufficiently accounts for it. It has pervaded, more or less, all ranks of people; and society has been disturbed and unhinged in almost every branch, by the propagation of principles and the tendency of practices, so generally prevalent and so alarmingly successful.

Out of the serious calamity, with which we were chastised for our immorality and profaneness in the early part of the year 1796, some measures were taken which promised to produce considerable advantages to the community. The CORN INSPECTORS Bill was of this de-

scription. It enjoins that, under severe penalties, all corn sold in the different markets shall be reported, with the several prices and quantities, to the inspector, for general information. But, except in one solitary instance in the neighbouring county of Hants, where a person offending in direct violation of this statute was prosecuted to conviction, there is too much reason to believe it is very imperfectly observed. In a very recent instance it has been well known, that the return of the prices of wheat was from twenty-five to thirty-one pounds a load, when wheat was actually sold at twenty-two pounds a load, under circumstances which must long make an impression on the memory of the persons acquainted with the transaction. No blame is hereby meant to attach to the inspector. He could only report what was returned to him. But there was blame somewhere, and the penalty, if sued for, or in a summary way, laid before the magistrates, was no doubt recoverable.

It is not pretended, that this occurrence was a PUBLIC transaction in the OPEN MARKET. It is not understood that, under such a view of the case, the letter of the law in the statute alluded to was infringed. But is not the letter of the law in other respects continually violated in our market in particular, and no doubt in many others? Are not the most considerable purchases and sales contracted in the respective inns and houses of accommodation? Are not these
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these bargains considered as a continuation of the market, though adjourned to these different places for convenience, or to be less interrupted? If any validity is to be allowed to charters or other authorities by which markets are at all held, all business ought to be transacted in the public forum. An instance of this occurred at our late assizes, when a verdict was obtained by the corporation of Marlborough against a refractory and obstinate butcher, who persisted in selling meat in his shop on the market day, in defiance of the charter, which requires him to carry it to the public market. It is a case in point; and the inference cannot be mistaken.

By these and the like **IRREGULAR PRACTICES**, the public are precluded from the advantages of a fair and open market, and a few individuals are suffered to prescribe the terms on which that public shall be nourished and supported. The unreasonable and extravagant demand of the farmer, in seasons when abundance and superfluity are not manifest, is submitted to by the miller or baker, without any means of investigating the propriety and reasonableness of the demand; and the community are compelled to submit to the advance, which the latter must consequently make upon the consumer, without having any remedy. It is an increasing evil, and, without legislative interference, which shall somewhere vest an effective controul, will be productive of irretrievable calamities.

So long as INTERESTED MEN will discard all morality and sense of duty, which their station in society imposes upon them, little hope is to be entertained of the success of moralizing. However such men may make a shew of religion, whether from custom or for the sake of example, it may be pronounced that they will be inattentive to "the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." What follows I wish not to repeat upon this occasion. I wish not to be charged with making a dry lecture in divinity, when I am professing to discuss a great and extensive political subject. We have seen and heard of persons, professing to have a very great and affecting sympathy for the afflictions and distresses of the poor, employing themselves in adding to those distresses by exertions immediately calculated to enhance the markets, already beyond the reach of even the middle classes of the community. If, therefore, interest is so extremely prevalent, that any one class of society is exalted to the gross injury of the rest, a remedy must be applied without delay, to prevent the operation of so pernicious a principle; pernicious in its effects, though, within reasonable limits, laudable in its motive.

I know it has been said, that the LANDED INTEREST must be supported and maintained; and consequently that noblemen and gentlemen will be extremely jealous of every measure which tends to limit the progress of that interest. At present, it will be unnecessary to say more than
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I have already advanced; for if, in a well-regulated state, every branch of the community is equally entitled to attention, no single interest can safely be permitted to predominate to the injury of the rest. But this subject may probably be resumed hereafter.

The more immediate causes, which lead to an advance of markets are now more immediately to be considered. And amongst the first of these may be deemed, the evil of **LARGE FARMS**.

That certain benefits may accrue from **LARGE FARMS** to the community, I am most ready to admit. The supply of the summer markets chiefly depends upon them. If there were no large farms, the consequence probably would be, a great influx into the markets in the autumn and winter, and a depression of price, and for the rest of the year the supplies would be very partial and precarious. The holders of large farms also will tell us, in addition to this, though naturally emanating from it, that in seasons less abundant, or even deficient, the public are most highly indebted to them for preserving it, to prevent absolute want and famine. These are specious assertions. Let us examine, then, how they stand in fact.

When all **FARMS** were **SMALL**, or at least comparatively so with respect to the present enlarged system, the farmers brought large quantities for sale, and frequently disposed of them at reduced prices, within four, five, or six

six months after harvest. The monopolist, perhaps, availed himself of such an advantage, especially if he could command a sum of money for that purpose; and sometimes made fifty or more per cent. by selling it again in summer at an advanced price. Of this evil the public in time were aware, and the legislature, with the view to a remedy, made laws to prevent monopolies, which produced to the adventurers such an immense profit. But this class of people, in the times I am alluding to, were comparatively moderate and conscientious men. If they could make twenty per cent. by this traffic, their gains were considered as fully satisfactory, and equivalent to the risk; but if they made thirty or forty per cent. they felt an unusual and unbounded consolation, as being in the high road to fortune. If, possibly, as I have observed, they at any time made fifty per cent. by this commerce, it was a matter almost incredible, and such as they could scarcely again hope to experience.

In comparison, therefore, with the WEALTHY and OPULENT FARMERS, who have succeeded to the class of people proscribed by the laws, for profiting in this manner by the wants of the small tenants, these monopolizers were very modest men. In a more distinguished degree the present race of farmers in general, have adopted the principle of monopoly. By a communication of opinions, and a certain knowledge that the country does not possess much
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more than a sufficiency, they can always alarm the public mind, and produce every effect of an actual scarcity. If a moderate advance would satisfy them, the public would contentedly submit to it; but when it is pushed forward to the extravagant rate of three, and even four times the price of a fair and just value, and no bounds are set to their avarice, the bulk of the community must feel the oppression, and will either sink under the weight and burden, or desperately resolve to infringe the public peace by transgressing the laws of society.

To an undue attention to the interests of the landed property of this kingdom, as one at least of the causes, these GROWING EVILS may certainly be attributed. In promoting this interest, large farms have succeeded to smaller ones. By this accumulation of farms, a monopoly, however prejudicial to the general benefit of the community, has been unexpectedly created. The name and mode have been changed; but the evil has been continued and augmented. It is an evil, pregnant with the most alarming consequences, of which the bare reflection is enough to chill the briskest blood.

Accused as I shall be of endeavouring to undermine the LANDED INTEREST of this kingdom, I know that the discussion of this subject, will probably occasion some alarm. But it is reason, and not the passions of men, which ought to be our guide in this important matter. I have said that this interest ought not to be so far

far stretched as to endanger the peace and existence of society ; and yet it will be admitted, that one class of the community MAY in fact be supported to the prejudice and injury of the rest. But this has long predominated. The fact is of public notoriety. At the short distance of FOUR years only, this country has been twice visited with the affliction of real or pretended scarcity. It is in every one's recollection. Speculation, and a withholding the very means of life from the public, were practised to a very considerable extent on the former occasion. In the late oppressive season, the recent change of the markets has proved that the same pernicious spirit and practice have been exercised.

In addition to what I have admitted respecting large farms, it may be said that these are cultivated with a LESS proportion of HORSES or other cattle, where oxen are used in teams. Perhaps this also may be true in some degree. Yet it merits consideration, whether the public is benefited by this supposed reduction of the number of horses, and the present consumption of the hay and corn necessary to maintain them. I think not ; and for the reasons which shall presently be adduced.

To form an estimate of this branch of the subject, we must view the large farmer's operations at SEED-TIME and at HARVEST. From those two important periods, considered in favourable and unfavourable seasons, our judgment

ment must be determined. It is from these that a serious draw-back must be made, in estimating the advantage of large farms to the community. In a favourable season, when it is all sun-shine and no storms, the difference will not perhaps so immediately appear; yet even here, I presume, the advantage must lie on the side of the lesser farmer. At seed-time he will avail himself of the properest season, or of an occasionally desirable turn of weather, to deposit his grain. Instead of being engaged in this business for near three months, as the large farmer is, one-half or one-third of the time will be sufficient for his purpose. In a season generally favourable, he will therefore select that which is most so; whilst the large farmer has no choice, but is compelled to go on, from beginning to end, at all hazards.

But in an unpropitious season, how stands the comparison between them? The SMALLER FARMER then has so manifest an advantage, that self-interest and partiality alone could have any weight to prevent conviction of mind. At seed-time, it will be very surprising, if one month of moderate weather shall not be had to meet the wishes, and, to serve the purposes, of the smaller farmer; whilst the other is obliged, if possible, to go on, and to persevere, at all events, in sowing his land in such cold, wet, and unfavourable seasons, as naturally lead to an expectation of the seed's perishing. Here, then,

then, certainly it must be allowed, that the lesser farmer has abundantly the advantage.

Let us next see how it stands at HARVEST. I am not now considering in what manner it operates on the hay-harvest, though there are many cases in which the observations would almost equally apply. I shall confine myself entirely to the WHEAT and LENT crops, as they are called. In a good season, it is admitted, that little or no advantage arises to the smaller farmer. When each have time abundant for their purposes, no inconvenience can arise to the holders of large farms. No cause for difference of opinion here subsists.

In a less favourable season, or one that is very unfavourable, how stands the comparison? Is it not evidently in favour of the SMALL FARMER? No, says the other; if he has only one-fourth of the quantity of ground, he cannot be supposed to have more than one-third of the number of horses, and as these will not be fed so well, they will not do more work than the others, with a fewer number in proportion to the extent of the farms. But fair and softly. Is there no other argument to be thrown into the scale? There is; and it is such an argument, as, in the seasons I am supposing, is armed with additional weight. The small farmer's lands lay within half a mile, probably, of his home; many of them perhaps within half the distance. His average distance, then, will be only one-fourth of a mile. In an unfavourable season,
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when generally some favourable intervals are met with, the little farmer, from his vicinity to his grain, will, in a short time, secure a large proportion of his crop, when those intervals occur; and his chances for success are comparatively very superior to those of the other. But we must estimate the distance also of the large farmer's grounds, which often lie two or three miles from his barton or farm; and supposing the former, his average distance will be one mile, which is four times as much as the other. And admitting that the barton is in some degree central, and that one-fourth of such average distance may be deducted, still it is obvious that the large farmer's grain must lie at about three times the distance from home, and that an incalculable advantage to the small farmer, and to the community, is derived in an unsettled season of weather in harvest. The latter probably will secure all his grain well; the former will as probably have a great proportion spoiled or very much injured, so as to be less valuable or useful to himself or the public.

There is yet another advantage to the community from SMALL FARMS. They are usually better manured and better cultivated. Every part is within the reach of dung or compost, which the distant parts of large farms are wholly excluded from participating. If a few more horses are kept, this additional consumption of food must be doubly procured by the improved state of the crops from the causes just
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mentioned. The advantage is indeed incalculable. For the proportional increased quantity of food produced by these means, would be such as, on future occasions, to meet the increased demand occasioned by an increased population, without risk or danger of any real or fictitious future scarcity, generally understood. In proportion also to the short distance of labour on the farms, especially in the time of harvest, the maintenance of horses would be more frugal, and less injury be sustained by them in their ordinary occupations.

These arguments it may be observed, are more peculiarly calculated for INCLOSED PARISHES and HAMLETS, or other inclosed farms, however relatively situated in other respects. But supposing this wholly inapplicable to farms in open fields, which I do not fully admit, though they are partially applicable only to such farms; as a great proportion of the kingdom is now laid out in severalty, by virtue of local acts of inclosure, to such they must doubtless be understood fully to extend. By the proprietors of estates, under these circumstances, they are therefore peculiarly entitled to attention. In the disposition of farms, by virtue of any future acts, their own interest (as will be shewn presently) and that of the public will be essentially concerned, in favour of lesser farms. And the same reasons must be equally manifest in all other cases, where there are inclosures of more than
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twenty-one years existence, for applying the same remedy in granting future leases.

Any thing which I have hitherto advanced, no way militates against the propriety of cultivating WASTE LANDS. If our population is increased, every fair means should be adopted to augment the supply in proportion, so as fully to keep pace with it. In the modes of cultivation also, and their permanent effects upon the soil, it should be well considered what practices will produce the greatest quantity, I do not barely say, of food, but of nourishment, for the benefit of man. For it is not barely by the bulk, but by the solidity and consistence, of our food, that its nutritive properties are to be estimated. It is certain that, by labour and industry, united with the judicious and plentiful assistance of manures and composts, garden grounds produce an astonishing supply from spaces comparatively of very small extent; and from this consideration also it is manifest, that small farms will always be productive, in consequence of their higher state of cultivation, of greater supplies for the support of the community. To a certain pitch of improvement, all soils may doubtless be brought; and it is every man's duty and interest, as population advances, to contribute his endeavours to reach that criterion. But large and unwieldy farms, as I have abundantly demonstrated, can never attain to it; and in vain will agricultural societies, though highly laudable and meritorious,

propose measures and confer premiums, with a view to such pitch of improvement, unless the necessary spirit can be more generally diffused, and more generally adopted, by reverting to the custom of smaller farms. On large farms they can only be adopted very partially, if at all; on small farms, of one-third or one-fourth of the size, and in some cases less, the advantages are much more probable. If we really want an additional supply of nourishing food; it must be ridiculous and absurd to reject the measures which alone can produce that supply.

It seems, then, that the PRICE of corn, in the most unfavourable seasons, ought never to exceed a certain proportion, beyond the regular and usual rate of a plentiful season. In this respect the legislature appears to have fixed a good criterion, in stating the ultimatum or maximum of the bounty on importation. As this is about double the ordinary value of wheat, it surely affords an abundant compensation to the farmer in seasons less abundant or less propitious. All markets should be so regulated, that this price should never exceed four pounds five shillings per quarter for good marketable wheat, in the dearest seasons, and consequently that the price of bread should never exceed such a price as this rate would fairly justify. Even that was considered as enormous in 1796, though in 1800 it has so far exceeded this standard. Within this limit of speculation, which would still be allowed for the operation
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the markets, the line of commerce might still take its course; and beyond that certainty no considerations whatever should be allowed to enhance the value.

Considering the article of WHEAT as a staple commodity, which surely it ought to be deemed, the reasons of such limitation must be obvious. Bread is an indispensable article of life. The community must be daily supplied with it. The consumption is certain and unavoidable. It is admitted, that the middle and superior classes of the people, even with the most rigid œconomy, cannot consume less individually than a quarter-peck, or half a gallon loaf a week. The resolutions of the legislature, and of others throughout the kingdom, after their example, sufficiently prove it. To this should be added one-third more, that provision may be made for the additional support of the poorer classes, who have frequently little else wherewith to maintain and feed themselves and their children. In the late severe season, when vegetables were scarce and dear, when butchers' meat as well as bread was at nearly three times an usual price, and far beyond the reach of the poor in the smallest portions, and when every article of food was advanced to an enormous pitch, this was manifest; and, when to this, a great deficiency of a quantity of bread sufficient for their existence is considered, is it possible to conceive a condition more wretched?

Without clothes, if the price is advanced,

the lower classes of the community may better dispense. If they cannot obtain decent and creditable apparel, they may wear CLOTHES that are less becoming and suitable to their condition. They may hope to look forward to better and more abundant seasons, when plenty and cheapness shall enable them, by their honest industry, to recover from this temporary depression of character and situation. But how can they compound for the want of bread? No substitute can be found for that. If the consumption could be lessened by the use of rice or other food, the price of those articles usually advances in proportion to the dearth of wheat. And if the poor man could get money for such a purpose, which he seldom can; if his wife is as notable for her domestic œconomy and good management, as she but too frequently is for the contrary; yet, with a numerous family of children crying around her for bread, and without the means of procuring it, her active and intelligent mind (if we can suppose such a *rara avis* to exist) will be depressed and overwhelmed with the gloomy prospect, and scarcely will she be able, after all, to combat the difficulties which must be encountered.

If, then, the comforts of the labouring part of the community are or ought to be the objects of LEGISLATIVE INTERFERENCE and regulation, this is a subject which requires and demands the fullest attention. If the strength and stability of government depend upon the
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bulk of the populace, it becomes the duty of the government to provide for the conveniences and necessities of that populace, according to their relative situations in society. Whatever, therefore, in society is essential to its existence, must be maintained, if in the ordinary course of commercial concerns it cannot be procured, by parliamentary or other tantamount regulation and authority. But, in the course of FIVE seasons, we have had two striking instances that in the common order of things this could not be procured; and the necessity of regulation, excepting those who are interested or obstinately dead to conviction, can be no longer problematical, to prevent a recurrence of a similar calamity. From experience, the best criterion of the importance of interference, we are taught a lesson which our political rulers will do well, as a duty they owe to the public, seriously to contemplate and consider.

I know it has been said, that legislative interference has usually been productive of MORE INJURY than BENEFIT to the public, in seasons where plenty is not a prominent characteristic. I know it has been said, that such an interference is an infringement of the liberties of the people of this country. The popularity of the subject has frequently served to procure converts to the measure of opposition against such interference; but perhaps, with no great pretensions to the character of conviction, as it relates to this peculiar subject. Now that we are emerg-

ging from the calamities with which we have been depressed, and whilst those calamities continue fresh in the memory, will be the proper season for discussing this great political subject; and forming by a legislative act some grand scheme of regulation for the future benefit of the public. In seasons less auspicious than the present plentiful and abundant produce of the country, vouchsafed to us by the bounty of Providence; the operation of such regulations will be fully manifest, and a repetition of the calamities we have felt so severely will be counteracted and prevented. A discussion of this subject may be safely trusted in the season of plenty; and a dispassionate examination of this topic ventured on without danger of enhancing the markets. It is to the United Parliament of these kingdoms that we shall have to look forward, for the benefits of this great national and general regulation.

If the calculation be just which states an **AVERAGE DEFICIENCY** of wheat, for the average consumption, to be eighty thousand loads, it seems that, on a medium of half a gallon for each individual per week, the population does not much exceed ninety-two thousand persons, for which the produce of grain does not provide; but if, in allowing an additional quantity, as before stated, to the labouring poor, this individual consumption is to be increased, then perhaps it may be sufficient to consider about seventy thousand persons as the excess of population,

lation, or about one in one hundred and thirteen, on a supposition of eight millions of inhabitants in England alone. But on an average produce of three quarters of wheat on an acre, one peck more on an acre would make an additional increase of about one to ninety-six, and consequently be more than adequate to the demand. And this, surely, must be considered as a very moderate increased produce of **FOUR OR FIVE SMALL FARMS**, instead of **ONE LARGE FARM**, from that increased pitch of cultivation which those lesser farms will naturally attain to. If it is admitted to hold good in one case, it certainly cannot be denied as a general effect. To accomplish this, therefore, is all which is necessary; and if this shall be accomplished, by whatever means, all fears of future scarcity in this respect must vanish.

But this system is not to be produced in a day or a year. The **EVIL OF LARGE FARMS** has been introduced gradually, and that system must be reversed gradually. Other remedies, therefore, must be resorted to. If the great farmers cannot be compelled to increase the produce, or to supply the markets regularly, at reasonable prices; a competition must be created, and a controul lodged, to counteract the mischiefs resulting from monopoly. A legislative act should invest the Privy Council with a power of importing grain, on any estimated deficiency; and that estimate to be taken in every parish, by persons properly deputed, and under proper re-

strictions, to be ascertained on oath, on a proportionate share of the produce of each farm. In every instance, the farmer is to be paid a fair market price for such share as may be taken, according to its produce, within a reasonable time to be specified. Returns, in proportion to the quantity taken, might be transmitted to government on a certain day in every month, under penalties to ensure the compliance; and the documents, thus transmitted, should be admitted as authority sufficient, under such an act, to empower the Privy Council to proceed as above stated. These checks would ensure to the community a certain supply of grain at a reasonable price. If the farmer is allowed, by a general law, to export his grain, when the markets are below a moderate price; the community have a right to expect another general law, whose operations shall have the contrary effect of limiting the price within moderate terms. I have no scruple in asserting, on the principle of common sense, as well as of common policy, that the public are justified in requiring this preventive remedy. The landed interest has been supported by the former; the public interest has a right to be preserved by the latter.

But it seems to be a problematical notion, that the HIGH PRICE of grain is a BENEFIT to the proprietor of lands, who is not an occupier. I confess myself to be extremely sceptical on this point. If every necessary of life is
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advanced to him, as a consumer, does he not, in common with people of inferior stations, equally feel the pressure? His tenants, perhaps, have long leases; and, by feeling themselves completely independent, have as little regard to their landlord as any other country gentleman. Beyond the observance of common civility, they are a race of men on a level with their superiors. Can the landlord have a fowl, a duck, or a goose at a cheaper rate than his neighbours? Can he, indeed, have them at all, except through the medium of the higler and the poulterer? Is he not compelled to pay two or three profits to as many different middle men, before even these things, heretofore of very inferior consideration, can reach his table? The farmer himself will tell you that he just raises enough for his own table; that he never sends any to market; and the reason is, that, the poulterer has purchased them at a stipulated price, and on certain days of the week regularly calls at the barton to take and receive them for the supply of the markets. Hence the unprecedented and extravagant price, which they have for some time past attained to; and hence the partial supplies, through the monopoly of farms, to which those markets are subject. This conclusion is the result of common sense.

Persons of LIMITED INCOME are among those who feel the pressure most severely. Besides the taxes to which they are subject, of which no idea could be formed twenty or thirty years

years past, are they not more than doubly taxed in the necessaries of life? And if, with such a drawback on income, they are subject to these pressures of the times, absolute poverty or abject servility must be the lot of many of those who have heretofore lived in a state of comfortable independence. Another class of people, therefore, have just cause of complaint, that one branch of the community is supported at the expence of the rest. By pursuing the same mode of investigation through the different classes of society, the same consequences will be produced, and the same inferences naturally follow from the premises advanced.

The necessity of ABSOLUTE MEASURES being manifest, to compel that moral rectitude and honesty which the virtue and integrity of individuals is too feeble to effect; perhaps little more is wanted to convince any unprejudiced, or uninterested person, that a regulation by parliamentary authority is indispensable. But it is not on argument and reasoning only, that these inferences are drawn. There are other facts, of sufficient notoriety, besides that of the intolerable price of grain, which may be adduced as auxiliaries. When Lord Darnley, with a truly generous and patriotic magnanimity, dared to advance in the House of Peers that the scarcity was a fiction, the little attention paid to his assertions, though he declared himself ready to support them by evidence at the bar of the house, must be in the recollection of most of
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my readers. His allusion to the respectable authorities of Mr. Webb and Mr. Davis, and the readiness of those gentlemen, upon the most convincing and satisfactory knowledge, to corroborate his Lordship's statement, is a convincing demonstration that the public benefit has long been sacrificed to private and individual interest and advantage. To truth, it is notorious, the farmers in general have long been strangers. There is scarce a village in which any considerable farmer resides, who has not possessed a large portion of grain, abundantly sufficient to ensure regular supplies to the public market. I have been informed, and the story is extremely credible, and I believe true, that a certain farmer, not twenty miles from the borough of Downton, of whom enquiry of the state of the quantity of wheat was made, with peculiar and distinguished REGARD TO TRUTH declared four or five months ago, that he had not above ten or eleven loads; and yet he has since continued regularly to supply the markets, at reasonable intervals, and at this moment possesses at least fifteen or sixteen loads on a very moderate estimation. This is produced as one instance to determine, whether it demonstrates the scarcity which has been pretended. Is it not well known also, that to the northward of the Devizes, after this alarm of scarcity had been studiously propagated, to enhance the markets, as great a quantity of ricks were remaining, as is usual at the same season in more plentiful years?

years? The late extraordinary influx of loaded waggons into that market, is a proof that the alarm was unfounded, and an iniquitous project to oppress the community. I forbear to mention many other instances of large stocks of wheat, in proportion to the advanced period of the season, at different times, in the possession of individuals, at no great distance from the city of Salisbury. To these I may add the recent accounts from Oxfordshire, which state that there is six months consumption in that county, and in many others sufficient to hold out till Christmas. An account has been also published from New Alresford, in Hants, the whole of which is so extremely in point, that I shall transcribe it at large :

“ The following statement of the prices and quantities of wheat at our market for the four last market-days, may afford matter of reflection to those who are in the habit of investigating the subject. It will doubtless appear curious, that on the tenth ult. wheat was *apparently* so scarce that it was difficult to procure it at forty-two pounds a load; and on the thirty-first, there was so visible a plenty, that the farmers were eager to supply us even at so low a price as eighteen pounds. The price of bread is subjoined: it does not appear to have declined in equal proportion with that of wheat; but perhaps it may be said that the bakers cannot afford to lose on their stock in hand :

July

	£.	£.	s.	d.
July 10, from	32	to 42	per load ; Bread	3 1 per gallon.
17,	32	to 38	Ditto	2 11
24,	22	to 30	Ditto	2 7
31,	18	to 24	Not known till to-morrow ;	

for as our Magistrates do not set the Affize of Bread, the Millers and Bakers have what they please for it ; but suppose it will be 2s. 1d.

July 10, but few samples at market.

17, upwards of thirty loads at market.

24, more than fifty.

31, Any quantity that was wanted.

Our wheat harvest is begun, and the corn of every kind is more abundant than has been known for many years."

And is the question to be forgotten, which was lately put to a farmer in the market of Salisbury, when he had the COURAGE to pitch a sack of wheat for sale, " Who had bribed him " to that action ?" Nothing, surely can more clearly demonstrate the systematic plan of plunder which has been adopted.

Some of the EVILS, which this conduct naturally occasions, have been mentioned ; but there are OTHERS that still remain to be noticed. I have glanced only on the effects it will have on the proprietors of lands. That subject will admit of a fuller discussion, and may fairly be resumed. It must obviously occasion the advance of rents, on the renewal of leases ; which the same holders will either accord with, or quit them, under apprehension that in future they may be less successful in their manœuvres, to be managed

managed by younger adventurers. If the former, the measures heretofore so successfully practised will be resorted to, whenever practicable. If the latter, perhaps from a conviction that the same bubble shall not again be played off upon the public, the moderate state of the markets, will be insufficient to support the high rent and taxes, and ruin must ensue. Landlords will thus be injured, the land impoverished, losses from insolvent tenants, general injury to trade, and universal convulsion among the landed interest, must be the effects of so impolitic a system.

But another evil seems to arise out of that I have just mentioned. If the land is impoverished, and the NEW RACE of TENANTS ruined, where will then be our boasted agricultural improvements? Where will be the supplies to meet the increased population, to which, it is admitted, the present produce of the kingdom is unequal? The system will be totally deranged by the measures unavoidably resulting from this conduct; and the impolicy of forcing up the markets by sinister means, will not be perceived by the interested individual, till, by an accumulation of the grievous evils, the whole be subverted by one general crash. God forbid that ever such a consequence should be felt in this country; but from so ruinous a system what good is to be expected? Are not the most alarming evils to be apprehended? evils which have convulsed a neighbouring country to its
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very centre, and shaken most of the continental states and empires from one end to another?

We are not, in considering this conduct of the farmers, wholly to disregard or overlook some other consequences. It is not only probable, but even certain, that many persons are at this moment in a state of CONSUMPTION, from the WANT OF BREAD in sufficient degree, or the compulsory alternative of eating barley-bread, and frequently too of very bad quality. Whether this may not be deemed a breach of the sixth commandment of the decalogue, I shall leave to such farmers who, for fashion sake, perhaps make their appearance at church, but would probably think themselves libelled in suggesting, that they had no more religion than a drayman's horse. Out of this imputation I wish to exempt some few, who appear to have been cast in a better mould; but as I proposed the expediency of considering the NATURAL or MORAL causes of our calamities, the suggestion appears not inapplicable to the subject, and the obvious result of the enquiry which was intended.

In looking at the heavy calendar of prisoners at the late assizes for this county, and the nature of the crimes with which they had been respectively charged, and the number of those in particular who were accused of stealing provisions; it seems difficult to attribute the respective offences solely to a viciousness of disposition, without connecting the OPPRESSION OF THE
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TIMES as a concurring incentive. Of a tendency to riots and confusions some symptoms also were displayed. It is seldom that such disorderly proceedings are productive of any good; and, at all events, the security of property and the preservation of public peace, should be leading objects of attention and regard. But such practices, whenever they exceed a moderate proportion, must originate in some fundamental error, and demand a suitable and effectual remedy. For as prevention must ever be preferable to punishment; it would surely be good policy to strike at the root of the evil, and not afford cause for complaint of such intolerable oppression. Perhaps it is to be regretted that riots should ever be crowned with success; perhaps we have the greatest cause to lament, that disorderly practices should ever be effectual. But the ancient adage, that "the hungry belly has no ears," and too frequently the reflection thence arising, that if a premature death awaits the necessities of the indigent, it is of little importance whether the executioner or famine deprives the offender of his life; to such alarming arguments, however irrational, what can be said? In one instance we have been informed from a neighbouring town in an adjacent county, that the riots produced an immediate reduction of eight pence a gallon loaf; and in another instance nearer home we have heard, that similar effects were in some degree produced, by a manifest tendency to disorder. If these are facts,
surely

surely they are most awful ones. If the laws are to be thus insulted at pleasure, is it not an encouragement to every species of anarchy and confusion? That cause must surely be a serious one, where practices and acts of such a nature are tolerated and submitted to. The hands of government are weakened, whenever the justice of the country is thus violated with impunity; and the monopolizing or oppressing farmer, whoever he may be, that occasions these irregularities, independent of the plunder and robbery he is indirectly guilty of from the rest of the community, does all in his power to subvert the government, under which he is suffered to exercise those oppressions. A good and loyal subject he cannot be; a good member of society it will not be pretended that he is.

It has been asserted, that several of these monopolizing farmers, on the late sudden change of markets, were tempted to hang themselves, and others to cut their throats, or in some other way to deprive themselves of life. Into the motives of such a DESPERATE REVENGE for the disappointment of their views, I shall not pretend to penetrate. If they have really performed on themselves such an act of moral justice to their country, which they had so grossly insulted, and rendered themselves unworthy to live in, where the laws could not effectually reach them; it either shews the strong exertions of conscience awakening them to a sense of their guilt, or the proud and im-

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perious nature of their minds which could not bear the tauntings and scoffings of those whom before, probably, they had treated with haughtiness, or the power of avarice which had perhaps been thus checked and restrained, to their great loss, or at least to their heavy disappointment. Unless common fame should prove a notorious jilt, and render herself indictable in the court of conscience as a common liar, a dealer in flour, who lives not more than one hundred miles from Salisbury, has *burnt his fingers*, by withholding from market a large quantity of that article, because his avarice was greater than his prudence, in refusing to allow a fair price for carriage. As the usual observation, it may be said that it is become "too hot to hold." A similar declaration has been made of the bakers, who have been compelled to open their bags to supply their stocks of flour in hand with fresh and wholesome air.

It seems a matter of extraordinary concern, that the PRICE OF BREAD in the city of SALISBURY should for so many months past have been much HIGHER than the ASSIZE in LONDON, or than the price in any of the neighbouring towns of Wilts, or any of the adjoining counties. To endeavour to account for this, the magistrates of the city, within a few days past, summoned the bakers to attend them at the Council Chamber. But of what avail could such an enquiry be, when it is notorious that they had all assembled, in the evening of
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the day previous to such attendance, to agree upon the kind and degree of information which should be given on the subject. Did they acquaint the magistrates, that they were in the practice of buying wheat at three pounds or more per load under the lowest price returned to the Inspector? This is not to be supposed.—Did they state to them that a comparatively small quantity of wheat is purchased at a high price, for the purpose of augmenting the average price, in that respect also, much beyond what it ought to be deemed? No.—Did they acquaint them, that almost all the wheat is purchased below the average price returned as the current price of the market, and that in this respect they gain a very great advantage? No.—Do they not know, or ought they not to be convinced, that a single sack purchased at a high price, is no criterion of the real state of the market,—that quantity should be considered as well as price,—and that all returns should be made in both? This is unquestionable. It is done specifically in the London market; and hence it is that the affize is so much lower within the Bills of Mortality. It ought to be done in all other markets; and Inspectors should be instructed to calculate the average, not on a single bushel or sack of the two extremes, without regard to quantity, but on the aggregate both of price and quantity.

This, indeed, will be of no avail, until measures are taken to enforce a PUBLIC transac-

tion of business in the CORN MARKET. It will be of no avail, until measures are also taken to put the laws in force against false returns either of price or quantity. Acts of Parliament are dead letters, unless enforced; and never was there a season, when it was so highly necessary to enforce them, by suing for the penalties incurred in transgressing them.

An equal difficulty of fixing an assize has occurred at DORCHESTER; but at length, from a suspicion of the true reason, the millers and bakers have been summoned to shew cause why the penalty of ten pounds should not be enforced. A similar investigation has been made at DURHAM, where a miller was convicted of not making a due return to the Inspector of the quantity and price of the wheat he had purchased during the preceding week; a system, in which the magistrates have laudably determined to persevere. Yet from Lewes in Sussex it is affirmed, that, notwithstanding a numerous attendance of farmers and millers, no return of wheat was made on the second of August to the Inspector, and that, from some cause or other, it so happens almost every other market day.

Notwithstanding the great quantities of wheat of native growth which are known to be in the kingdom, and the vast influx of foreign grain and flour into the ports; the market at Warminster on the second inst. (August) rose upon an average, eight shillings per quarter, or two pounds

pounds per load, which will have the effect of advancing on the quartern loaf, one penny.

It is understood, however, that this WARMINSTER JULEP has been of infinite service to the FLOUR MERCHANT alluded to in a preceding page; whose prudence has been questioned in refusing a fair price for carriage. It is conjectured that the ingredients forming this draught, have been, of a very composing nature, and bid fair to relieve him from the apprehensions entertained of a fever in the brain. A second dose of this sort will, I trust, be unnecessary; and though he may have *caught a little cold* in the pocket, it is hoped that the effects may gradually dissipate, and alarming symptoms in other respects be counteracted and prevented. I shall only add, that if, as I have demonstrated, the scarcity of wheat has been fictitious, there is great reason to suppose that other sorts of grain have been at least somewhat more plentiful than has been pretended.

Many of the conjectures already advanced have been realized. It is a fact, which can be proved sufficiently by several persons in Salisbury, that a MILLER and DEALER IN CORN purchased in NEWBURY market, the thirty-first of July, thirty loads of good English wheat at seventeen pounds per load, and could have purchased one hundred loads, or indeed almost any quantity, after the same rate. And yet we have long been very gravely and hypocritically,

tically, I had almost said, infernally told that there was a real scarcity.

It is not in England only, that this game has been so long playing off on the PUBLIC CREDULITY. It is stated from EDINBURGH, that on the twenty-ninth of July, that market contained three hundred and seven bolls of oatmeal, a greater quantity than had been seen at any one time within the year. Except on one occasion, not nearly so much had ever been pitched. The public had long been told of excessive scarcity, but on the near approach of a new harvest, this extraordinary supply suddenly appears. It is justly remarked, "surely these oats have not grown since Christmas! Where then have they been during these months of scarcity, and when the price has been so excessive, and is still so high as three shillings and four-pence per peck?"

But certainly our blood must boil with indignation, when we learn, that at Bristol, on the night of the twenty-eighth of July, two soldiers who had been relieved from guard, detected a man with a wheel barrow, on or near the quay, containing ROTTEN FLOUR, that had perished by hoarding, which he was conveying to be thrown into the river. He acknowledged that he had been employed before in a similar way, but refused to name his employers. *O tempora! O mores!*

One of the London papers of the fifth of August states, that one of the Wiltshire farmers will

will lose one thousand pounds by the FALL OF WHEAT, *on his old stock* only, without any calculation on the advantages he had hoped to make from the new crop. And in another London print, of the same date, it is stated, that a farmer, not five miles from MARLBOROUGH in this county, has declared that he shall lose five hundred pounds by withholding wheat from market, and refusing an enormous price for great part of it. He has now by him two ricks, seven loads, and five bags of old wheat; and has sworn never to dine again at an ordinary (where, we may conceive, he had been persuaded by his neighbours to keep it back) but carry his crust in his pocket to market, and there quietly mumble it under a pent-house, and for ever deplore his folly, avarice, and extortion. Unless my Readers should consider this as an act of penitence, they will probably say, with me, it is pity that such plunderers should ever have a crust to mumble.

I have alluded to the *manœuvre* at Warminster. From that neighbourhood several purchasers came to Salisbury market, on Tuesday the fifth of August, and prevented a farther reduction, though it fell in London five pounds per load on Monday. The millers there are said to have declared that they would push up the markets, if it cost them fifty pounds a man; how truly I know not, but the effect on our market was, as I have stated. Though bread is with us at two shillings and five-pence per gallon;

gallon; it is now selling at Banbury, Newbury, Hungerford, &c. from six-pence to one shilling a gallon less.

One of the prints referred to, after some reasoning on the article of hops in beer, as a NECESSARY of life, for which none but pernicious substitutes can be found, thus expostulates: "Is the health of the people a just care of government and the laws; or is it not? And is it, or is it not a crime to poison the health of the people?" With what motive the writer asks these questions, I shall not trouble myself; but they are so completely applicable to my present subject, that they cannot be too frequently inculcated. Do they not fully apply to the conduct of the farmers, and the manœuvres of the millers and bakers, to keep up the markets? Do they not prove a combination, which is so powerful, that the strong arm of law, or a new Act of Parliament, can alone destroy?

Two informations have been laid at BRIDGE-WATER, for the crime of FORESTALLING, in purchasing sixteen tons of potatoes of the growing crop, to be delivered between Michaelmas and Lady-day; and the parties are bound over to prosecute. As a duty to the public, a salutary execution of the laws will, we trust, become general.

